

SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

EX. 16:2 And the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness:

3 And the children of Israel said unto them, Would to God we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger.

4 Then said the LORD unto Moses, Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law, or no.

5 And it shall come to pass, that on the sixth day they shall prepare that which they bring in; and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily.

6 And Moses and Aaron said unto all the children of Israel, At even, then ye shall know that the LORD hath brought you out from the land of Egypt:

7 And in the morning, then ye shall see the glory of the LORD; for that he heareth your murmurings against the LORD: and what are we, that ye murmur against us?

8 And Moses said, This shall be, when the LORD shall give you in the evening flesh to eat, and in the morning bread to the full; for that the LORD heareth your murmurings which ye murmur against him: and what are we? your

murmurings are not against us, but against the LORD.

9 And Moses spake unto Aaron, Say unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, Come near before the LORD: for he hath heard your murmurings.

10 And it came to pass, as Aaron spake unto the whole congregation of the children of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and, behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud.

11 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

12 I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel: speak unto them, saying, At even ye shall eat flesh, and in the morning ye shall be filled with bread; and ye shall know that I am the LORD your God.

13 And it came to pass, that at even the quails came up, and covered the camp: and in the morning the dew lay round about the host.

14 And when the dew that lay was gone up, behold, upon the face of the wilderness there lay a small round thing, as small as the hoar frost on the ground.

15 And when the children of Israel saw it, they said one to another, It is manna: for they wist not what it was. And Moses said unto them, This is the bread which the LORD hath given you to eat.

God Provides Manna and Quail

Lesson Text: Exodus 16:2-15

Related Scriptures: I Corinthians 10:1-10; Exodus 6:1-8;
John 6:30-58; Numbers 11:4-34

TIME: 1445 B.C.

PLACE: Wilderness of Sin

GOLDEN TEXT—“Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst” (John 6:35).

Lesson Exposition

THE PEOPLE’S COMPLAINT—

Ex. 16:2-3

Over several months, the Israelites had witnessed ten miraculous plagues poured out on the land of Egypt.

Now finally and fully free of the Egyptians, the Israelites headed into the wilderness. Only three days after their song of praise at the Red Sea (15:1-21), they found themselves without drinking water and murmured against Moses (vss. 23-24). In response to Moses’ plea, the Lord miraculously provided water and then led the multitude to an oasis (vss. 25-27).

This would become a pattern for the Israelite nation in the wilderness. They would face trying situations in this desert land, just as one might expect, and they would repeatedly murmur and complain against Moses and Aaron and ultimately against the Lord.

As the Israelites traveled southward on the Sinai Peninsula toward Mount Sinai, they came to an area known as the Wilderness of Sin (16:1). This barren land offered little in the way of food and water, and it was now one month after they had left Egypt.

Exodus 16:2 tells us the “whole congregation” began to complain against Moses and Aaron. Their complaint concerned a lack of food (vs. 3).

In stating their lack of contentment with the situation, the people said it would have been

better for them to die in Egypt “by the hand of the Lord” than to starve in the wilderness. The plagues were probably in their minds. They had been spared from the plagues, but in retrospect they thought it would have been better to die from them than to come all the way out into the wilderness to suffer and die there.

The people said they “sat by the flesh pots” in Egypt (vs. 3), suggesting they had never lacked for food there. While they may have embellished their memory somewhat, there is no reason to believe they did not have enough to eat in Egypt since they had raised cattle and sheep there (cf. 9:4-7; 10:9).

They had brought those animals with them, but at least two factors weighed against slaughtering them for food now. First, the very fact that they were on the move would have made the slaughtering and preparation and preserving of the meat very difficult. Second, the short-term benefit of having meat would have detracted from the long-term benefit of having milk and cheese from these animals.

Sadly, the people charged Moses and Aaron with deliberately bringing them into the wilderness to die of hunger there. It is instructive to notice what this hardship did to these people. It caused them to lose all perspective. Suddenly they now saw their time in Egypt as the good old days.

THE LORD'S RESPONSE—

Ex. 16:4-8

Promise of provision (Ex. 16:4-5). Interestingly, God responded without any indication that Moses or anyone else spoke to Him. The people had complained that they lacked meat and bread. The Lord spoke to Moses, immediately and graciously addressing both those needs.

First, the Lord said He would “rain bread from heaven” for them. He would freely give them a special bread that would satisfy them. In this, “God was teaching them a concept: that he was their ultimate provider, the one who from heaven gave them not necessarily what they expected but what they really needed” (Stuart, *New American Commentary: Exodus*, B&H Publishing).

While this bread was a gracious gift of God, it would also serve as a test to show whether or not they would obey the law He would give them. “It was not just a test to see if they could follow instructions but a test to see if their hearts were inclined to be his covenant people” (Stuart).

This test would also involve faith. God would provide the bread by sending it each morning. The people would have to gather it from the ground according to the Lord's instructions. Later the specifics were given (vss. 16-26).

The people would have to trust God for their daily provision. They could not gather all they could and then store it up for the future.

Words of rebuke (Ex. 16:6-8). Moses and Aaron then passed on to the people God's promise as well as His rebuke. That very evening they would be assured that it was the Lord Yahweh alone who had brought them out of Egypt.

In addition, the following morning they would see “the glory of the Lord” (vs. 7).

Moses told the people that the Lord had heard their murmurings and would give them bread. The Lord would also answer their desire for meat that evening. This would apparently be for that day only, but the bread that would come the following morning would continue to be provided.

Again, Moses said these heavenly gifts were in response to their murmurings. This did not

justify their complaints as a means of manipulating God but rather reminded them that God knew their hearts and their needs. Moses then turned to the real problem with the complaints of the people. They had spoken against Moses and Aaron, who were merely representatives of the Lord. Their complaints were actually against God. He, not Moses, had led them to this place.

THE LORD'S PROVISION—

Ex. 16:9-15

Divine glory (Ex. 16:9-10). The Lord then instructed Moses to gather the people before Him. This probably means they were to draw near to the pillar of cloud, where the Lord's presence was manifested. The reason for gathering there was that the Lord had heard their murmurings. This suggests that what He was about to do was in some way a rebuke.

As the Israelites watched, the “glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud” (vs. 10). Whatever its nature it must have been an awesome display.

Divine reassurance (Ex. 16:11-12). The Lord then spoke to Moses again, telling him to reassure the people that in the evening they would eat meat and in the morning they would have an abundance of bread. Again, the Lord mentioned that He had heard the “murmurings of the children of Israel.” This was a reminder of how gracious God was to provide for them what they wanted even when they had complained about the circumstances into which He had led them. This provision would assure them He was the Lord their God. No one but the God who had miraculously delivered them from the powerful Egyptian pharaoh could provide for them in this way.

Provision of meat (Ex. 16:13). The meat God had promised arrived that evening in the form of quails. This is the only verse in the chapter where quails are mentioned. The emphasis is on the ongoing provision of the bread from heaven.

However, there had to have been a massive number of these birds to feed the two million or more Israelites even the one meal. Quails “migrate regularly between south Europe and Arabia across the Sinai Peninsula” (Cole,

Exodus: An Introduction and Commentary, InterVarsity). God directed them to this place at this precise time.

Provision of bread (Ex. 16:14-15). The promised bread arrived for the first time the next morning. When the dew had evaporated, the Israelites found a strange substance on the ground. The Bible describes it as “a small round thing, as small as the hoar frost on the ground.” The description later in the chapter is more detailed: “it was like coriander seed, white; and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey” (vs. 31).

While the people could describe its appearance, they initially did not know exactly what it was (vs. 15). They called it “manna.” The meaning of this word has puzzled many scholars through the years, but it probably came from the Hebrew question, “What is it?” This was the people’s initial response and it became the given name of their new food.

As the Israelites looked at the white, wafer-thin material, Moses explained, “This is the bread which the Lord hath given you to eat.” The manna was used to make bread (Num. 11:8).

God’s grace is indeed amazing. He lovingly provided the food His people craved even though they had murmured against Him and His chosen leaders. And God’s miraculous provision of manna continued for the entire forty years Israel was in the wilderness (Ex. 16:35; cf. Josh. 5:12).

—Jarl K. Waggoner.

QUESTIONS

1. When did the Israelites arrive at the Wilderness of Sin?
2. What did the people claim would have been better for them than being in the wilderness?
3. What charge did the Israelites bring against Moses and Aaron?
4. How did God address the people’s complaint?
5. In what way would the bread from heaven test the people?
6. In what sense had the people murmured against God Himself and not just Moses and Aaron?
7. What assurance would the divine provision give the Israelites?
8. What kind of meat did God provide?
9. When did the bread arrive, and what did the people call it?
10. How long did this blessing continue?

—Jarl K. Waggoner.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Grumbling companions will test good character, possibly revealing character faults (Ex. 16:2).
2. Trust God in trials, remembering what He has already done for you (vs. 3).
3. God’s provision is not limited by man’s circumstances (vss. 4-5).
4. The Lord is merciful despite our sin, but we should not murmur against Him or His leaders (vss. 6-8).
5. God often reveals His glory most clearly in times of adversity (vss. 9-10).
6. As God provides, He reminds believers that He is who He says He is and does what He says He will do (vss. 11-12).
7. God is faithful to meet His people’s spiritual and physical needs (vss. 13-15).

—Cheryl Y. Powell.

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. What was life like for the Israelites when they lived in Egypt? Why were they now longing for Egypt?
2. What promises of God could have reassured the Israelites during their journey through the Wilderness of Sin (cf. Ex. 6:1-8)?
3. In what ways are Christians tempted to grumble today?
4. Have you seen God provide for His people from unexpected sources? Discuss.
5. What does the experience of the Israelites in the desert teach us about how God can provide?

—Cheryl Y. Powell.

Golden Text Illuminated

“Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst” (John 6:35).

Taking this verse at face value yields a couple of vital truths. Chief among them is our desperate need for Jesus. You and I need Jesus even more than we need bread.

The most powerful aspects of this golden text become evident when you consider that most of the crowd following Jesus were following Him only because they saw Him multiply food for others. “Of course I don’t think this way!” we might conclude. Let us not be too quick to think we have escaped a materialistic mind-set.

This week’s golden text is drawn from principles in the lesson text, Exodus 16:2-15. Moses and the Israelites were blessed with quail after the people had complained that the Lord was not taking care of them. In His mercy, the Lord provided for His people.

Similarly, Jesus’ teaching on His own sufficiency to meet our spiritual needs was given in response to an audience that harbored ulterior motives. Through both examples, we see the Lord calling His people to faith. So, if you truly believe in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour, then the Holy Spirit will use His Word to convict you and lead you toward a lifestyle of worship instead of one of grumbling.

Jesus said that by believing in Him, we will never hunger or thirst. Through faith in Christ, every sin is forgiven and every spiritual longing finds its fulfillment.

—J. A. Littler